

you're summer, he's fall (and i don't know what i am)

by tenderlogic

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Summary:

Tucked under Nancy like some little kid who can't handle their temper or some shit, Jonathan just frowning above him, as he tries desperately to breathe, fucking breathe again- it's the worst thing.

God, oh God, Steve would take the Demogorgons over this.

(But that's not true, is it? And that's the whole problem.)

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Steve doesn't know what leads him to Jonathan and Nancy sometime after school but he's there and finds himself, hands stuffed in his pockets, as he watches them stare at him in some awkward confusion. Steve coughs and smiles at the two as if there's not a thick wall of tension between them.

But that tension's not really there for the reasons it used to be anymore. Now it's the kind of tension that Steve's built up himself, where he's kind of tried to step back and give everyone their space and leave them alone. But, he finds, when he steps back, there's no one there but him and it kind of sucks.

And if he's being honest, Nancy and Jonathan are good friends and shouldn't be pushed away just because he's scared. So he's going to try. And this is his way of... trying.

Yeah, he's screwed.

"So," he says. Nancy raises her eyebrows and crosses her arms. Jonathan merely watches on with that closed off expression that makes Steve wonder what he's thinking. "I was wondering if you guys wanted to grab something to eat tomorrow after school."

Nancy continues staring with those raised eyebrows. Jonathan's mouth is pressed shut, evidence of a frown creeping onto his features.

"Nevermind," he says. "Dumbass idea anyway."

"Why do you want to eat with us?" Jonathan asks and something in his voice is accusatory. Like the idea of the three of them doing anything together that doesn't involve life or death is an insane idea to him.

Steve shrugs. "We can..." he pauses, "talk."

"Talk," Jonathan repeats. He lets out a laugh that's strangely close to a scoff. "About what?"

Steve shrugs, suddenly wishing he'd never walked up to them or

opened his mouth. He's too rash anyway; why the hell did he think this was a good idea?

But that's just it- he didn't *think* it was a good idea. He didn't plan it. He just went forth and did it because that's what his instincts are doing these days, drawing him to Nancy and Jonathan for some godforsaken reason he can't place. Maybe it's because they're the only people his age who know what the hell they've been through. Maybe Steve is jealous in some weird way he hasn't figured out. Maybe it's-

"Steve?" Nancy asks. "Wh-"

Steve doesn't let her finish.

"Nevermind. Stupid idea anyway. I've got shit to do."

He's off before they can say another word.

Steve decides the *shit he needs to do* is drive around Hawkins like a maniac, looking for something else to put his mind to. He finds himself driving down Mirkwood (nerdy fucking name if he's ever heard one), then he panics just a little bit and pulls off the road, stumbling out of his car, slamming the door shut, and breathing heavily. He needs to calm the hell down but at some point, he's forgotten how and he's in this constant state of panic.

He clammers back inside and revs his car up again, barreling back to where he came from and decides to take Dustin and his stupid endearing friends on an impromptu trip to the arcade all because he doesn't have the balls to deal with whatever it is that he's feeling.

But the kids look at him like he's God after that and, okay, maybe being a coward pays off sometimes. A little bit.

The next day at school, Steve attempts, with all of his being, to just avoid Jonathan and Nancy entirely, even though it feels like it's physically killing him inside to do so. But luck isn't in his favour (or maybe it is, who knows?), and Jonathan comes up to him as he's

grabbing his stuff from his locker.

"Nancy wants to know if you want to come by my house for lunch and studying this Saturday."

Steve shuts his locker and turns to Jonathan with a frown. "Nancy wants to know if I want to come to *your* house?"

Jonathan frowns. "Yeah."

"Oh," Steve says dumbly.

"You have to bring the lunch though."

"Okay."

"Yeah." They stare, unsure. "So, you in?"

"Sure. I can uh, bring KFC."

Jonathan gives a small smile that looks like one of relief. "Cool," he says.

Then, just like that, he's walking off. Like he's unbothered by it all. He probably isn't.

Dick.

(He doesn't mean that.)

Saturday, Steve pulls through KFC and orders a bucket of chicken. Then he's speeding down the road, on the way to the Byers' house with a bucket of KFC in his passenger seat. Honestly, what the hell has his life come to?

When he finally pulls up, he sees Joyce's car isn't there and that makes him more nervous than it should because it's not like Nancy or Jonathan are his enemies or something. No. But they're practically the only friends he's got at this point and he just doesn't want to mess it up with whatever the hell is going on in his head right now. Which,

he can't even figure out at this point.

He sits in his car and breathes deeply until he finally has the guts to pick up the almost-cold KFC bucket, his backpack, and the textbooks that wouldn't fit in the bag, and walk up to the door. He knocks on the door to the Byers' house and waits, leg bouncing the whole time, until Jonathan pulls open the door and gazes at him, searching him up and down, then lets him in. Steve walks in, the bucket of KFC perched against his left side, backpack dangling from his right arm, and textbooks tucked up under his arm.

"I'm glad you came," Nancy says to him with a small smile and he smiles back, just as falsely bright, he hopes.

But maybe he just *shouldn't* have come because as he starts walking to set stuff down, he's dropping the books onto the floor and it's so loud it sends his mind somewhere else and he leans to pick them up but the stupid bucket of KFC drops and he's flinching and as he turns to take care of that, his damn backpack hits the floor and Jonathan and Nancy are coming over to help *and* their footsteps are so loud, it sounds like something slamming onto the floor, maybe from the walls, from the Upside Down. And Steve is barreling towards the door so fast he doesn't-

He doesn't realise he's stopped until he's wrestling with Jonathan who's telling him to *calm down, man* and Nancy's grabbing him by the shoulders, telling him it's okay, and then Steve loses his balance. He's on the floor, under Nancy (and not in a hot way at all), breathing heavily (and, again, not in a hot way), and the lines between reality and the past start to blur. He's not really seeing Nancy or Jonathan, just some demonic and terrifying threat that looms over him. He's without his bat, without anything to defend himself and he's scared shitless.

Somewhere along the line, Steve's become traumatized and it's stupid and pathetic and so damn *stupidstupidstupid* and he cannot handle this, fuck no. Tucked under Nancy like some little kid who can't handle their temper or some shit, Jonathan just frowning above him, as he tries desperately to breathe, fucking breathe again- it's the worst thing.

God, oh God, Steve would take the Demogorgons over this.

(But that's not true, is it? And that's the whole problem.)

"Steve," she says quietly. "Steve, what's wrong?"

"Get off me," he says, muffled and choked. "Get off me."

"Nancy," Jonathan says softly like he's talking someone into putting a gun down. "Give him some space."

She gets off him at that and Steve scrambles up, looking around him as if something's going to jump out at any moment. He's practically spinning in dizzying circles, emotionally and physically, until he collapses into the sofa and buries his head into the palm of his hands and the world just

muffles.

There's no Demogorgons, no Demodogs, no Upside Down right here, no. He's in the Byers' living room, panicking like a dumbass on a couch he probably shouldn't even be sitting on. There's no you're-gonna-die danger in site but it feels like there is and that's the whole issue, right there. There's nothing there but it feels like there's always that chance that there might be and he has to be prepared.

But he's not. He's not. He's not prepared at all. He never was and he never will be.

Someone sits beside him, weight welcome and grounding against his thigh and shoulder. At first, he's certain it's Nancy because no way in hell Byers is gonna sit next to him. But then Jonathan is talking to him and it's right next to Steve and he really can't ignore that.

"For Will, it's like he's never out of the upside down," Jonathan starts. "He wakes up in the middle of the night and he's screaming. It's like he never left. Like he never was rescued." Jonathan's eyes look far off. Steve slowly looks to Nancy who determinedly looks at the ground. "I think we're all a little afraid it's not over, even though everyone tells us it is. Like Will. We want it to be over but our heads won't let us believe it is."

"I keep your bat in my trunk," Steve says in a moment of bravery, through the thick glue in his throat, "because when it was over, it wasn't really over."

"I know," Nancy says quietly. "It's never over, is it?"

There's so much heaviness and pain in her voice. Steve wants to kiss it away. But that's not his right anymore, is it?

"Always gotta be prepared," Steve says. "You never know when some monster is gonna come through the walls."

Jonathan laughs beside him. They're so close that Steve feels the vibrations of the sound in a dizzying intensity.

"Shit," he says finally. He leans against the back of the couch. "It's all so... messed up."

"Welcome to the crisis club," Nancy says with a soft laugh. She sits down beside him on his other side and grasps his hand. Steve's eyes flicker from her to Jonathan. Jonathan looks like it isn't affecting him so Steve tries to not let it affect him either. But it is, heart thudding and stomach squirming. It's telling enough that he doesn't rise and bolt the hell out of the house. When you've fought monsters, went into some whole other fucking world and almost died a couple times, holding hands with your ex-girlfriend while her current boyfriend sits beside you doesn't feel all that weird.

It should. It should, it should, it *should*. But it doesn't.

"Sounds like a fun club," he says sarcastically as he stares at the ceiling.

Someone pats his knee and it should be Nancy, but no, it's coming from his right side where Jonathan is, laughing quietly. And when he's done, the hand stays there; not too heavy, not too light. It's just there. Comforting, somehow.

"Immensely," Nancy says.

"This is not a conversation I thought I'd ever be having," Steve says.

"We're different people now," Nancy says.

"Or we've always been this way," Jonathan says. "Just didn't realize we were fully capable of... reaching this point."

"No, I was just a dick," Steve says and Jonathan lets out a startled laugh and Nancy giggles comfortably.

"You were," Jonathan says in a way that sounds like, and *you're forgiven*.

You don't fight literal monsters together and come out still hating each other. Or maybe you do and Steve and Jonathan are exceptions. Who fucking knows? Who even thinks about these things? Steve does, apparently, and it's driving him a little bit insane right now, edges of panic seeping out of his body and leaving him a little buzzed and shaky.

"None of us were angels," Jonathan says after a while.

"Oh, come on," Nancy says. "What about me?"

Jonathan laughs. "Especially not you."

Nancy laughs and lets go of Steve's hand to lean over and shove Jonathan's shoulder playfully. Steve should feel out of place but he doesn't, weirdly enough, even when Nancy tucks herself under Steve's arm and closes her eyes and Jonathan reaches his hand over and carefully, hesitantly, brushes away the hair from her face. Nancy mumbles something about how they should probably be studying to which Jonathan just chuckles at as her eyes flutter closed.

After a while, Steve gets the balls to say something. "Is this weird?" he asks quietly.

Jonathan gives him a look that Steve can't quite read but it isn't angry or annoyed or anything remotely malicious.

"Just don't overthink it, man."

And that's not really quite an answer but... it's good enough.

Author's Note:

I have a feeling my fear of screwing up is actually making me screw up in terms of this fic lmao.

Feedback is always appreciated!